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Paul Strand's *Ghana* and photography after colonialism

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### Paul Strand's *Ghana* and photography after colonialism

With its stillness and harshness, its intensity and sensuousness, the late work of Paul Strand (1890-1976) sometimes seems anachronistic, a reversion to a different moment in photographic history. The books he produced in this period – *La France de Profil* (1952), *Un Paese* (1955), *Tir a'Mhurain* (1962), *Living Egypt* (1969), and the last, *Ghana: An African Portrait* (1976) – are more respected than written about.<sup>1</sup> This benign neglect has ill-served an understanding of photography's challenges in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly Strand's conflicted attempts to make work that might capture the state of older social formations at the moment of their enfolding by new political configurations and new social forms, changes that seemed both global and epochal.

These books are the products of a dual motion: a retreat from McCarthyite America to France (where Strand lived from 1950 onwards), and an expansion of Strand's ambition into a sequence of projects with an internationalist perspective. The latter took him on visits to Italy, Morocco, Egypt, the Hebrides, Ghana, Morocco and Romania, all resulting in books or unpublished book projects. The personal retreat was thus the prelude to an ambitious advance, to communities and nations on the edges of what had been considered modernity's epic territory. So this was not only a move towards an internationalism in subject matter and in collaboration (Strand worked closely with leftwing writers on most of these books), it was also a sustained yet unprecedented engagement with what we would now recognise as globalisation, or what Strand's political associates might have understood as uneven and combined development. At the same time as this new subject matter, Strand turned to the medium of the photographic book with its inherent tendency to the fixed, even the monumental, rather than the

fleeting. Alongside these new developments – and balancing what could easily be a nostalgic tone or a shallow search for alternative, actually-existing utopias – was a thematizing of subjectivity as something at stake as much from photography's own operations as from broader social and global changes. The challenges these books embraced were thus also the big themes of that historical moment: forms of solidarity in societies caught between the ideologies of east and west, the question of what would happen to close-knit communities in the face of globalization, the survival of memory and the uses of the past in the face of rapid modernization, and – particularly important to Strand's last book – the end of empire and the making of new nations and new political identities.

Strand's earlier work suggested little of this. Initially aligned with Alfred Stieglitz's long campaign for an artistic photography and recognised as part of a second wave of Pictorialism, the early photography was concerned less with resembling art than with demonstrating photography's claim to have an exceptional status in portraying the modern subject and its new sensations, most particularly those of the big city. But Strand came increasingly to identify his own distinct aesthetic politics as well as his politics of "affiliation and allegiance."<sup>2</sup> The House Un-American Activities Committee was certainly right that he became close to many Communist Party members in the 1930s, a participant in a number of leftist political and artistic groups, and directly active through the Photo League and the campaigning films he made with the Frontier Films group.<sup>3</sup> His most interesting work was a curious balancing act between documentary concerns and modernist aesthetics; between brutality and exquisiteness; between "capturing" a blind

woman in the street, and rendering the print so finely that Walker Evans declared his encounter with it a moment of revelation.

Such are the basics familiar to anyone encountering Strand's work in the standard accounts. By the middle of the century he was left with peculiarly over-determined aesthetic means: the dense effects beloved of Pictorialists, the chilly abstractions of modernism, and the fact-seeking "social eye" of documentary realism. Strand was not comfortable with any of these traditions taken whole, rather it was the dynamic between them that gave his work its special status within photographic history. One result is that we doubt what we should do or feel in front of the blind woman, because the ethical problem of being able to stare closely at her without her knowing, and to do this with some aesthetic pleasure, remains hovering about the image. Later the whole relation of power to subjectivity becomes not so much ambivalent, as with the blind woman, but instead freighted with a sense of inexplicable potential as we encounter an image of subjectivity that gives nothing of itself except its resolution; a sense of belonging, that is to say, without the metaphysics of individuality. This is why portraiture – as artistic genre, as metaphor, as facial recognition, even as the projection of new national identity – becomes the central problematic of the last of Strand's books.

### The promise of Ghana

*Ghana: An African Portrait* has been treated as at best a coda to Strand's career, the book appealing as little to accounts of American photography as to the more recent flourishing of studies of African photography. (FIG. 1) Yet it is the motivating political context, and Strand's complex response to this, that most call out for the book's reconsideration.

Strand's interest in Ghana lay in the idea of new national identity, the being-industrialised, and the layering of new social forms on old, and he presented these not in the form of revelation or exposure, the typical tropes of documentary photography, but in terms of individual and situational identities in relation to a collective self-realization understood as independent of the narratives of colonialism if still bearing their formative effects. The situation as Strand perceived it, then, relates to what have since been called alternative (or multiple) modernities, emphasizing different versions of modernism and distinct experiences of modernity outside the west. But Strand's work is more searching and politically purposeful than the "infinite play of possibilities" suggested by some theories of alternative modernity.<sup>4</sup> Thus, although Strand was obviously foreign to Ghana his approach became confluent in several ways with the policies that Kwame Nkrumah (1909-72), its first postcolonial leader, was already developing. To engage with the alternative modernity of postcolonial African nationhood was also made problematic by the inherent limits of social realist photography: its temporal restrictions in showing the effects of colonialism, its proximity to state propaganda, and its seemingly inextricable involvement in the power of the gaze. A further complication was that by the time *Ghana: An African Portrait* was published in 1976, the year Strand died, Ghana's dream had soured along with Nkrumah's reputation (deposed in 1966, he was dead by 1972).<sup>5</sup> There is something intriguing in the awkward temporal shifts and non-synchronicity of all this: a historical moment and place whose unprecedented and rapidly changing character the book attempted to capture in still, calm, even monumental terms; and then the changing fortunes of the subject even before the book is published.

There seemed great promise at the project's start back in 1963, when Strand teamed up with Basil Davidson (1914-2010), the Communist journalist he had collaborated with on *Tir A'Mhurain*. Strand's interest in portraying Egypt in 1960 was largely motivated by the desire to portray a country soon after an anti-colonial revolution, and the same was the case with Ghana. The partnership with Davidson was politically and aesthetically intimate from the start, driven, like many radical intellectuals at this time, by mutual admiration for Nkrumah's new-born nation. Strand thought of a "portrait of Africa" as the subject for a book as early as 1959 and initially considered several possibilities, including the River Niger, Guinea, Nigeria, or a trans-Saharan journey.<sup>6</sup> His friendship since the early 1950s with the great pan-Africanist W. E. B. Du Bois,<sup>7</sup> a self-exile from the USA who had settled in Ghana, and Davidson's contact with Nkrumah, seem to have swayed the decision. With its non-aligned status, its strong role in pan-Africanism, and not least the chance of direct collaboration with its charismatic leader, Ghana was the most attractive choice.

In 1963 Ghana was probably at the highest point of its influence and promise as a newly independent state, yet its success was in the balance.<sup>8</sup> The colonial Gold Coast Government had tried to control the pace of change through a new constitution in 1946, but strikes, riots and boycotts forced it to bring in another constitution in 1950. In the subsequent elections of 1951 Kwame Nkrumah was voted the continent's first African prime minister. Constrained by the presence of a colonial governor, Nkrumah pressured the official schedules for change and in 1957 full independence was granted to the new nation. Understanding Ghana's immediate post-independence years is still made difficult as much by the opportunism that attended accounts of Nkrumah's regime immediately

after its termination (by a coup and counter-revolution in February 1966), as by the hindsight that has accompanied the resurrection of Nkrumah's reputation since the 1970s. American-educated and learning his pan-Africanism from such men as Du Bois and his political tactics from Mohandas Gandhi, Nkrumah had skilfully allied the post-war disappointment of returned army veterans with the impatience for change of a younger mass movement, the *sans-culottes* "verandah boys," to form the Convention People's Party (CPP). The promise of modernization in industry, education and urban infrastructure, and at a pace consonant with the country's aspirations, was a crucial part of Nkrumah's appeal. The combination of a mass following, particularly in the cities, with a project of accelerated modernization was galvanised by Nkrumah's understanding of socialist theory. The realization of these hopes in a country whose diversity of production had been limited by colonial policy, was challenged by two further factors: first, the unification of different peoples and many different languages, a diversity that had been emphasized by the British better to control the area; and, second, Nkrumah's own policy of marginalizing traditional authority. Into the mix, and part of his rhetorical insistence on giving up primordial loyalties, was also thrown Nkrumah's increasing interest in a greater nation, a pan-Africa, for which Ghana would be a model and Nkrumah himself would pose as a potential leader.<sup>9</sup>

Inevitably there was opposition. Nkrumah was clearly not a puppet of the west, his commitment to state ownership challenged the interests of investment capital and his pan-Africanism threatened other colonial regimes. The first major crisis occurred in 1961 when fifty critics and opponents of the Government were locked up under the Preventive Detention Act. An assassination attempt and street violence followed in 1962. Caught at



the intersection between the “terrible material resistance” of a largely pre-industrial economic system,<sup>10</sup> and the coming-into-being of a modernising African country, Ghana’s lack of a national past was only a part of its challenge. After 1963 Nkrumah “was increasingly a man besieged.”<sup>11</sup> Still in the future were the more grandiose projects, especially new government buildings in Accra and the notoriously expensive conference centre for the Organization of African Unity, a platform for Nkrumah’s pan-African ambitions that also became a symbol of his over-reach.<sup>12</sup>

#### Nobody has ever photographed Ghana

To “portray” this nation was inevitably to take a stance on its current regime and to fix something in a state of necessary flux. Davidson’s view of photography in the country was dismissive: “Nobody has ever photographed Ghana,” he wrote, “except (a) hosts of amateurs (b) sensation-mongers – naked bosoms and all that jazz; and (c) humble practitioners in the arts of advertising and publicity.”<sup>13</sup> These comments might be ascribed either to self-interest or to a very skewed experience of photography in West Africa. It is impossible to believe, at the least, that Davidson was unaware of *Drum* magazine, Africa’s leading illustrated magazine, which had its own Ghana edition. His dismissal mirrors a view held by photographic historians until recently that “photographic knowledge... had been the province of ethnographic studios, colonial travel narratives, and commercial exotica.”<sup>14</sup> In fact photographic culture in Ghana at this time was deeper rooted and more sophisticated than Davidson would allow: from local photojournalists working for the *Daily Graphic*, or Christian Ghagbo’s work for the Ghana editions of

*Drum*, to documentary and portrait photographers like James Barnor and J. K. Bruce Vanderpuije.<sup>15</sup> But while there was a more substantial and variegated photographic culture already existing in Ghana than Davidson recognised, it tended not to present Ghana as an exemplary postcolonial nation in the making. This latter tended to be a government-supported approach, attracting photographers from outside Ghana, one where Ghana stood for the whole of Africa, for the most essential qualities of African-ness, or for the outward face of Nkrumahist ideology.

Here, too, Davidson was unaware of the precedents. Willis E. Bell, for instance, was an American photographer living in Ghana who in 1961 published a photo-book, *The Roadmakers*. (FIG. 2) The book was published by the government though it had no direct input from Nkrumah and its agenda was essentially a form of technological boosterism: “new roads to our prosperity... under the leadership of our men of wisdom.”<sup>16</sup> The book tried to bridge pre- and post-colonial eras, but without any substantial context for either. By comparison with the intensity of what Strand would produce, Bell’s photography was aimlessly detached, distanced as much by its picturesque effects as its conventional sentiments. Ghana was presented less as a pan-African model than a sub-branch of the Family of Man.

There was one set of outsider’s photographs that conjured up some of the new ideals at the same time as it radically destabilised them, and as such it deserves extended consideration. Davidson certainly knew about Richard Wright’s book *Black Power* (1954), but he would probably have assumed its author was one of those “amateur” photographers.<sup>17</sup> Wright was best known for his novel *Native Son* (1940) and his autobiography *Black Boy* (1945), but photography increasingly played a part in his

thinking about how power was structured into the visualisation of race. In 1941 he and Edward Rosskam published *Twelve Million Black Voices – A Folk History of the Negro in the United States*, in which Rosskam's choice of photographs, mostly from the Farm Security Administration archive, made a strong counter-beat to the insistent pulsing of Wright's prose. Text and images presented multi-authored registers of expression, sometimes brutally frank in their subject matter, more often probing the way the "folk history" of the subtitle was mediated.<sup>18</sup>

Although he had at least as much access to Nkrumah as Strand and Davidson were to do, Wright might have welcomed the accusation of amateurishness when he published *Black Power*, and not just because it squared with his writing's new reliance on techniques of shock and personal interjection. This new form of individualized political response was also declared by Wright's statement of distance from Communist Party cultural politics, made in the book's opening pages.<sup>19</sup> His "portrait" of the then Gold Coast was an overtly subjective travelogue,<sup>20</sup> an aleatory account gathered over ten weeks, an expression of "reality as it seeped into me... roundabout."<sup>21</sup> In one sense Wright's photography, interspersed in eleven groups across the British edition of the book (the American edition only had two photographs), seems subsidiary to his writerly mode of conveying the bewilderment of direct experience and the political self-questioning that came from it.<sup>22</sup> Photography was a medium in which Wright had recently developed a strong interest and no little competence, and now it played a more substantial role in developing the sense of constantly, and self-reflexively, coming to terms with what was around him and what his identity was in these surroundings.<sup>23</sup> "I

took out my camera to photograph the scene,” he notes when he is bewildered or aroused by what he sees, “I got out my camera.”<sup>24</sup>

Wright’s book offers a series of anti-epiphanies, which concatenate effects of repulsion rather than desire.<sup>25</sup> Thus the camera punctuates numerous episodes of encounter, often changing the scene into one centred on a gaze either refused or pointed back, pointedly denying the revelation of self and identity. In the book’s first image a bare-breasted girl carrying a bowl on her head stares back, “calmly and confidently” confounding Wright’s expectations and causing “a vague sense of mild panic, an oppressive burden of alertness which I could not shake off.”<sup>26</sup> (FIG. 3) In another image, titled “They rushed out of their shacks and saluted the Prime Minister,” two women stand staring and gesturing towards the camera, momentarily drawn out, it seems, from a tumbledown structure behind them. (FIG. 4) Wright had been travelling in Nkrumah’s car so the women’s gestures and the way they look at the camera position the viewer/photographer as the car-borne leader, he who is to be saluted, in a performance of identity-by-association.<sup>27</sup> In one of a pair of images a brass band play for a funeral but also, apparently, for Wright the photographer judging by how relaxed the band members seem around the camera, acknowledging it and smiling. In the paired image, however, a man with a long knife passes: “[he] objected to my presence and I respected him,” notes Wright.<sup>28</sup>

Portrayal’s place in such images is barely achieved. It is a confusing contest, a case of misrecognition, uncomfortable self-awareness, even threat. The epiphany of self-revelation, that trope of symbolist-modernist photography epitomised by Stieglitz’s work, is not to be achieved; but equally the truth of otherness, the central trope of social

documentary photography, is always out of reach. As well as subjects that will not render forth their identities and be contained by the image, so the onlooker looms into the foreground, intrusively self-present. Wright's book exemplifies a certain mode of seeing which has many similarities with the interlinked concerns of contemporary existentialism and francophone Négritude. Wright had lived in Paris since 1946, he had collaborated with Jean-Paul Sartre and he was involved in setting up the publishing house and journal *Présence Africaine* in 1947 to support the work of black writers. Sartre's dialectics of seeing and being seen, his interrogation of Cartesian perspectivalism, and even his ocularphobia have obvious similarities with what is going on in much of *Black Power*.<sup>29</sup> However, the book's refusal of a universal subject (of which black subjectivity was cast as a subset) and other essentialising viewpoints, means that it has little or nothing in common with Négritude.<sup>30</sup>

The struggle for understanding in *Black Power* involves a kind of fraught energy that charges the Sartrean "nonreciprocity between look and eye"<sup>31</sup> in a distinct way, refusing as much to ventriloquize its subjects as to claim community with them. Wright was troubled about the problem of identification with Africans given the different traumas of his own African-American experience, as well as what this mis-identification implied about racial identity; there could be no easy commonality around African alterity. Symptomatic is his constant weighing up of cultural differences and similarities at the same time as he thrusts his disappointments, tensions and physical discomforts to the forefront. His images pick out emotionally charged facial expressions and reiterate the decay, disorder and filth on which his text lingers.<sup>32</sup> He was particularly critical about the state of industrial modernity in the Gold Coast, although he measured it against a

paradigm of western modernization and development.<sup>33</sup> On arriving he was immediately impressed by the port at Takoradi that “seethed with activity... a forest of derricks, cranes, sheds, machines... they were being operated by black men – a fact that must have produced pain in the heart of Dr Malan of South Africa.”<sup>34</sup> Yet, typically, he was also confused by the “kaleidoscope of ... fantastic scenes” that confronted him.<sup>35</sup> He despaired about the hot, damp and corrosive conditions, and their insinuating entropy: “this place was under a sentence of death... Throw the whole of Detroit into this inferno of heat and wetness, and precious little of it would be left in a hundred years.”<sup>36</sup> And one of his grimmest descriptions is of men behaving like “spokes in a wheel” in an entirely un-modern scene, “glistening black robots” unloading cargo by hand from ships on the Accra beach “as they had laboured two thousand years ago.”<sup>37</sup> The equivalent photograph, notably, does not attempt to live up to the power of this verbal account.

Wright’s reviewers felt betrayed by his book. How could an African American be so downbeat about an African country? More implicitly, how could the hard-won promise of community in some of Wright’s novels now be abandoned to such individualistic expressionism? And how could someone with so little experience of the country offer such trenchant advice to its leader (Wright had placed a notorious letter to Nkrumah at the book’s end)?<sup>38</sup> It would be unsurprising, then, if Davidson had a blind spot for the book; it explored a thematic of personal encounter that could only be rendered by a constantly self-reflexive expression of the inadequacy of experience and understanding. If this was “amateur” then so was any attempt to make personal experience question received knowledge.

### An African portrait

In *Ghana: An African Portrait*, Strand's approach took a more calculated distance than Wright's, and was more carefully poised both technically and thematically.<sup>39</sup> It was also differently confrontational. Already having rejected photography's role as witness, in the sense of bearing testimony to an event, Strand put firmly to one side any subjective experience on his own account. His research followed practices established in his recent books. The three months he spent in Ghana was enough time to move through the main regions of a relatively small country, but not long enough to constitute anthropological fieldwork. Although understood as a form of research, this travelling was pre-ordained in its findings, the itinerary intended to secure a sense of completion;<sup>40</sup> there was little allowance for that sense of discovery, the serendipitous and the personally challenging that pervades Wright's book. Furthermore, Strand scrupulously avoided any sense of trophy hunting or heroicising; he wanted his photography to document but not become reportage.

If Négritude was the form of African modernism that Wright's book engaged, then the political and cultural proposition around which Strand's book circled was the emergence of Ghanaian society into international socialism and pan-African status through a process of regeneration on its own terms. Davidson came to see the "curse of the nation state" as the legacy of colonialism, and his text reiterated the mantra that "a portrait of Ghana could also be a portrait of Africa." Indeed, Davidson began his text with "The View from Wa," a chapter on a remote town in northern Ghana where, he claimed, "one sees this country in its continental setting."<sup>41</sup> Strand's photographs, which

break into Davidson's chapter, start as if similarly determined to capture something unyielding: a simple window in Sawla, (see FIG. 1) close to the camera; an elephant's skull, even closer; and a tree trunk, so close as to fill the frame.

Strand's photographs complement (and therefore require) Davidson's informative text because their job was distinct from the conveyance of information. They showed workers but not labour, machines but not commodities; they needed time but did not imply special insight; and they portrayed people but did not intrude on their private worlds. Hence the range of subjects: jungle landscapes with trees looming above; still lifes in the form of close-ups of foliage, vegetables, or carvings; portraits posed in shallow spaces with the sitters usually looking back at the camera; the products of pre-modern indigenous cultures manifested by crafts, wall paintings, or architectural details; and modernity exemplified by heavy industry or engineering projects. Everywhere, across these subjects, the richly insistent textures of adobe, bark, metal and fabric brought another layer of commentary.<sup>42</sup> A new subject matter also entered the book – the processions, rallies, political meetings, and party symbols of public political life – and this gave it a more dynamic imagery and an internally contrastive temporality not found in Strand's work since the 1930s. (FIG. 5) This contrast of static and dynamic might be understood as less a western trope than a part of Nkrumahist ideology, particularly the policy to marginalise traditional groups within a larger national and pan-African agenda. The material also contributed to another shading of the book's meaning. A project that had started out as a celebration of Nkrumah's Ghana had inevitably, given the book's late publication, become an elegy, if not for the "Nkrumah cult" then certainly for the pan-African promise embodied by Ghana.<sup>43</sup> In his final, retrospective chapter Davidson wrote



of how, even before 1966, Nkrumah's "[pan-African] vision retreated like a mirage," his rule had become "oppressive." After 1966, "'tribalism' and regionalism" re-emerged and "Ghana became a small provincial country turned in upon itself and stranded on the verge of African affairs."<sup>44</sup>

The larger context of reception was also affected by the book's delayed release. At its inception, Strand clearly had Nkrumah's regime as well as western readers (both sides of the Iron Curtain) in mind as the book's audience.<sup>45</sup> Left aground by Nkrumah's fall from power, there was no effective public for the book in Ghana by the time it was finally published, even if its publisher had been interested in a cheaper edition. It is clearly not the café or the street that is implied by *Ghana*'s size and hardback cover, or by the great care Strand always took over his prints. Democracy of access to the photographic book was not his concern. Perhaps *Ghana* was destined less even for the public library than for the sitting room or the study, for private, individualised spaces at great remove from the worlds represented within its pages. Those worlds, far-flung, socially exotic, marked in some way by alterity, are penetrated by the camera's eye, made legible, given aesthetic form and order and then brought into the ideal viewing conditions, the private protocols, comforts and leisure behaviours of the book reader.<sup>46</sup> For the Ghanaian reader, excluded by the book's price and distribution, its later impact on Ghanaian photographic culture would be little compensation.<sup>47</sup>

### The level gaze

Even more than Wright, Strand's books are punctuated by images made by a camera pointing at faces and, almost equally, by gazes that point back at the camera. (FIG. 6) In

*Ghana* such staring faces can be found in 17 out of the 93 images, and there are a further handful that nearly stare back. After the late 1930s, Strand's portraits consistently attempted a levelling out.<sup>48</sup> They are level in a physical sense as the result of using a heavy tripod to locate the view camera (and therefore the viewer) as spatially equal, through a relationship treated as visually orthogonal. Sometimes Strand used a wooden step ladder to help him see through his raised camera at the same height as the sitter's eyes,<sup>49</sup> the tripod's bulkiness and height inevitably adding to the obtrusive presence of the photographer going about his business. Inevitably in these circumstances picture-taking becomes a scenario in which sitters are engaged and made into collaborators, the photographer into a performer, a public orchestrator of looks and poses. The portraits are also level in an intended inter-personal sense, developing Lewis Hine's and Walker Evans's interest in an ethic of sociality, a mutual or participatory viewing in which sitters are neither distant nor passive.<sup>50</sup> Strand particularly took up Hine's understanding of the camera as a means of public communication and therefore something not to intrude into those social and subjective spaces deemed private. Accordingly, visual intimacy had to be balanced by psychic distance or impenetrability: there may be a collective identity out there, but it is not assumed to encompass the viewer. Through this strategy Strand handled not just what we would now call "cultural difference" but human difference, alterity, in general. The level view, a strategic combination of intimacy and distance, also absorbed and adapted the different rhetorics of the "New Vision" or the "New Man" so typical of the angled images, from above or below, of leftist avant-garde photography in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>51</sup> This working against older utopias was tied to a recognition of

new psycho-social conditions. In the context of *Ghana* this level view was a way of figuring the post-colonial pan-African subject of Nkrumah's political ideology.

The question Strand's images seem to ask, it follows, is not how we can understand the other, but how we can establish human presence without presuming understanding. In other words, how we can accept that the space of the self or the home is off-limits to a properly ethical photography at the same time as we want photography to reflect on how the public world is made up of private selves and bears upon private spaces. Put like this, Strand's project is perhaps not so far from Wright's. If we bracket off the agonistic Sartrean qualities of *Black Power*, then both Wright and Strand accept limits on what can be known through seeing; despite their different approaches they both want to present seeing as an encounter between human subjectivities that cannot be (Wright) or must not be (Strand) rendered as translatable or knowable. The photograph, whether "amateur" or "level," whether volatile or composed in its inter-subjective dynamic, is a limit test, a declaration of irresolution, a facing up to the uncertainty of knowing the other.

Strand's technique and choice of images thus encouraged a stare that seemed to preserve individual privacy, a form of comportment that denied vicarious disclosures and inner truth. More like the philosophy of Sartre's contemporary Emmanuel Levinas, and not without a Nietzschean disdain for the appropriative instinct of pity,<sup>52</sup> the "inward world" of the other,<sup>53</sup> like a land too often incorporated or exploited, is defended at its border by the face impenetrable to our desires. The strategy is positioned in opposition to what, say, the contemporary photographer Margaret Bourke-White called "the face that would speak out the message from the printed page."<sup>54</sup> But whatever philosophy of

interfaciality is suggested,<sup>55</sup> and whatever collaboration is inherent in the mechanics of the photographic transaction,<sup>56</sup> reciprocity is made at least ambivalent by these images. It is here that Strand found a way of visualizing alternative power, of power in the alterity of the subject outside capital as much as outside the colonial gaze. Intractability, durability and dignity are effects of this style; they take a visual form that resists or denies empathy as an illusion of solidarity.<sup>57</sup> If, as Frantz Fanon put it, a “world of reciprocal recognitions” was desired then colonialism and racism could not simply be wished away.<sup>58</sup> But there is also a sense in which this stare was often already there in West African photography before Strand arrived. It is there in the indigenous photography that scholars have unearthed in recent years, it is there in photography produced by and for anthropologists,<sup>59</sup> and it is there in both cases as part of Ghanaians’ expectations about the act of photography. With this in mind, the stare in Strand’s work can be understood to have the properties and resonances of other psycho-political discourses rather than only those arrived at in Strand’s work. Whether he was aware of this is less the point than that his sitters’ attitude to the camera and to portrayal already carried these implications. What is different, crucially, is the context – of other photographs, of sequence, of text, of the book-form itself – created by Strand for his portraits.

“Yaa Kyeiwa, Bodwease,” (FIG. 7) “Nana Oparabea, High Priestess, Larteh,” (FIG. 8) and “Man in a Cap, Nayagenia” (FIG. 9) typify this approach. People look straight back at the camera, telegraphing no emotion. In the first, the space is shallow and the subject close, an intimate speaking distance away. Immediately behind her is a whitewashed adobe wall whose rough surface and soft shadows, cast from a window

outside the picture, contrast tactilely with her black glossy skin. The formal leanness of the image and its understated repetitions (gentle hillocks of cloth, shoulder, and grey adobe), as with many other portraits in the book, provide a seemingly undetermined space. It seems to imply a life that is separated out as much from immediate circumstances as from western consumer society. In another context, this taut ascetic emptiness has been described as a means by which portraiture attempts to transcend or repudiate the genre's tendency to mythologize the relation between portrait-subject and place, and there may be something similar here. The emptiness of surrounding space may be a way of understanding "these individuals [as inhabiting] places of their own making that are cerebral, moral and psychic."<sup>60</sup> In relation to Ghana, such a trope resonates with a moment when the post-colonial nation-state is coming into being. Empty space is where post-colonial citizens are in the making, where the people come to form their new representativeness.

At the same time Strand's images are set within a book, an object in which the consideration of images as singular is only one part of the many experiences offered, including of course the fault-lines between different forms of address. Strand locates "Yaa Kyeiwa, Bodwease" across a double-page spread facing "Bas Relief, Larteh Shrine," in whose even shallower space two stylised animals stare back inscrutably; one page is as lacking in tonal contrast as the other is replete with it. "Nana Oparabea, High Priestess, Larteh" is similarly paired with an echoing image, this time part of a carved relief of a figure and a sword whose gold head again stares back. "Man in a Cap, Nayagenia" is paired with an image of the Volta Dam, the puckered skin above the bridge of the man's nose rhyming with the gibs and stays that meet and hinge at several points in

the industrial view. Strand, unlike say Robert Frank or Walker Evans with their pairing of images and blank pages, forces a comparative form of viewing. What might otherwise, in a portrait tradition, have been signalled as symbolic attributes of a person by their visual contiguity within an image, are here presented as separate but made into pairings across the double pages.

Larger cultural problems seem deliberately courted here. “Man in a Cap, Nayagenia” is Strand’s version of the Ghanaian New Man, the industrial worker posed opposite Ghanaian modernization. It breaks with one racial stereotype that would cast industrial technology as only a product of the colonizer but at the same time steers clear of the essentialized alternative of the time – Négritude as pure negation and symbolic violence. Meanwhile, the pairing of Yaa Kyeiwa and Nana Oparabea with inanimate objects or surfaces may encourage readings in which the inscrutability of a person seems equated with the inscrutability of inanimate objects without inner life. Colonial representations prized the idea of the impenetrable other (though it was always penetrated in some way), and the combination of human subject and cultural artefact may reinforce western notions about a withheld African essence. And yet both persons and objects are, in another sense, quite accessible and scrutable, visual versions of the readings provided elsewhere in the book. The bas relief opposite Yaa Kyeiwa, for instance, depicts two lions, each with a knife in its back, beneath a sacred stool. Almost certainly this is one of those parables prevalent in the cultures of the region, the figurative language of everyday wisdom. Similarly, Nana Oparabea was well known among African Americans who traced their lineages to the Larteh region. Oparabea initiated them in Ghana and was later invited to America to establish several shrines.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the design of the fabric she

wears is as readably “modern” as her scarification is readably “traditional.”<sup>62</sup> Shrine and sculptures of ancestral spirits were crucial to Oparabea’s official identity; there is no particular secret withheld in this pairing.

### The unequivocal opposite

The Lewis Hine tradition of collaboration with the human subjects represented in photography and of ethical thinking about disclosure and respect for these subjects, is usually considered to have unravelled by the 1960s.<sup>63</sup> Richard Wright’s work endorses this view, presenting authenticity not as collaborative disclosure but as a matter of personalised emotion emitted and worried through in the face of a world that can never be objectified by the photographer. Strand’s book certainly works against the grain here, and not only because it is populated by faces emblematic of mutual looking, but also because it treats collaboration with one special individual, Kwame Nkrumah, as key to the whole. Here is its difference from the historical drift, but also a new set of problems arising from portraiture’s relation to statecraft in its postcolonial forms. Strand’s project offered a particular opportunity for Nkrumah, not only a representation of Ghana as pan-Africa but a portrait opportunity outside state commissioned portraits and photojournalism, and an opportunity he probably imagined as having significant bearing on his image in the West rather than in Ghana itself. Portraits of Nkrumah had become a familiar, if not uncontested part of Ghanaian public life since his election as Prime Minister in 1951, and especially after Independence in 1957. This official portraiture ranged from Nkrumah’s image in murals and posters, bronze casts of a standing statue by Nicola Cataudella, giant portraits paraded through the streets on special occasions,

Nkrumah's head on coins and stamps, and of course photographs posed for the mass media and reproduced and sold for private display.<sup>64</sup>

Strand's Nkrumah was equally a matter of position as of image, of pose as of clothes. The position of the portrait in the book was critical and became a source of tension when Strand showed Nkrumah a maquette of the layout of photographs in June 1965.<sup>65</sup> It is relevant that Strand's pivotal exchange with Nkrumah took place over a model for the book. Consisting of contact prints cut up, kept individually in small plastic folders, and in this case tied together into four volumes, such maquettes enabled Strand to offer publishers and interested parties like Nkrumah a sense of what the book might be like before its format was fixed.<sup>66</sup> The maquette's size and flexibility might also have encouraged the kind of negotiations over layout that ensued in the meeting with Nkrumah.

One imagines an odd scene on that June day. Passing through London, Nkrumah took time out from his busy schedule as the leader of the first sub-Saharan postcolonial African nation – and, de facto, of pan-Africanism – to ponder Strand's little maquette. What ensued was either a case of cupidity such as Nkrumah's opponents liked to record after his fall from power, or the opposite, an example of courtesy and modesty; perhaps, even, both.<sup>67</sup> Anyway, Nkrumah seemed unenthused or perhaps too distracted to appreciate the maquette. First, he seemed not to want his portrait in the book,<sup>68</sup> then he quibbled about its place, demanding its removal to the frontispiece. Following convention, this positioning would implicitly stamp Nkrumah's authorship, as the Garibaldi of Ghana, on the work; his image would establish the determining agency of the nation as the book's pre-text.<sup>69</sup> The presence of Nkrumah's regime – actual or



imagined, wished for or required – was crucial to Strand’s nation-portraying project.

Wright also felt some need to open his book via an official portal: the American edition carried not just two images of Nkrumah as a frontispiece but even a letter from Nkrumah validating Wright’s stay in Ghana.

Strand was prepared to compromise about this entry into his book. At first he offered to retain a portrait in the middle of the work, as in the maquette, but also to introduce a portrait in semi-profile for the frontispiece. As he explained to Nkrumah, the portrait in the middle was crucial to his conception:

the structure of the book requires a strong portrait of you at this point, one which symbolizes the purposeful strength of your leadership. Placed here we want to say with this image, that you, with the people, and through the Convention People’s Party you founded, have given the splendid impetus and direction which are recreating Ghana. You may recall that just before the appearance of this portrait, the book had been mirroring something of Ghana’s past, ending in a series of rather sad images which sought to reflect the stagnation of the colonial period... And it is precisely against this deathly colonialized world that your portrait would appear as its unequivocal opposite.<sup>70</sup>

Strand writes “*With* the people” and “*through* the Convention People’s Party” [my italics]. Furthermore, the portrait would not just be placed centrally in the book as a whole, it would immediately follow the “past... stagnation... this deathly colonialized world.” So, for Strand, centrality was a matter of both solidarity and of a sequence that

told a story of eclipse and succession. Using centrality was part of the way Strand wanted to deal with Nkrumah's unprecedented status, the fact that to represent him as a post-colonial leader, both of a new nation and of a putative pan-Africa, was also a task in the making. The frontispiece, that enshrined part of the "father of the nation" mode, was thus displaced by this position of centrality. (The book actually ended up with no frontispiece image at all.) Of course centrality in a book has certain problems, especially when, as it turned out in the final book, it is not dead centre but roughly "central" – you only know you are there when you have reached Nkrumah's image. Curiously, the first image of Nkrumah in the body of Wright's book (the other is below it on the same page) also occurs roughly halfway through his book, with "Nkrumah in action" silhouetted against the sky and addressing a crowd through a microphone. Here the central position seems inadvertent and unprepared for, less a matter of calculated leadership portrayal as another incident in Wright's travelogue. By contrast, Strand wanted centrality because it would then be critical to his sequencing, the process of centre-discovery that he was encouraging. Following Strand's reasoning, with the discovery of what was at the heart of national emergence comes the understanding of the Nkrumah portrait as fulcrum rather than pre-text; the reader's discovery is also the moment of turning, when the charge or weight of the past is to be balanced by or passed on to the new nation.

How does Nkrumah's semi-profile portrait actually function in this "central" position? (FIG. 10) Apparently simple in its portrayal, Nkrumah's head nearly fills the frame and seems almost sculpturally modelled. Receding to the top left, the head's looming physicality contrasts with the almost texture-less white shirt below and the entirely white wall behind. The attributes are few but they seem crucial. The image

inevitably carries with it the weighty prototype of the Roman bust and its connotations of republican patriarchy. More immediate are the patterns of difference and occasional resemblance that the portrait creates with other portraits of Nkrumah and with portraits within the book itself.<sup>71</sup> One of the most telling relations with the former concerns his clothes. Political authority in new postcolonial states often required that clothes signal multiple allegiances, depending on place and occasion: the army officer, for instance, the western statesman, the religious affiliate, or the traditional leader.<sup>72</sup> Nkrumah would adopt Kente cloth, a smock from Northern Ghana, a state umbrella, or a clan staff, and he was known by a range of titles.<sup>73</sup> Strand's portrait is far less overt in its affiliations. In the semi-profile portrait, seen as turning away from the camera, Nkrumah might be understood as absorbed in some higher business rather than concerned with the making of a photograph, and therefore as not requiring the same directness as his staring countrymen; this he more than makes up for with his physical immediacy, his there-ness. By pointed comparison, images of the industrial workers Moses Lawaragu (see FIG. 6) and Albert Appiah, both a few pages further on, are in one case in semi-profile and waist length leaning against machinery and glaring back at us, and in the other in full face and staring off to the right.

Nkrumah's matters are weightier and belong, if only by association, with a higher class. Only in one other portrait – of the Navropio of Navrongo, a traditional leader in the Northern Region known for his support for the CPP – is another bust length semi-profile used. (FIG. 11) Slightly further back from us, the Navropio looks leftwards across a double page, Nkrumah rightwards out of the book. One is surrounded by textile and adobe patterns, and wears a metal chain and a fine grey beard; the other by ascetic

whiteness including the “modern” white cotton of his unbuttoned shirt. The semi-profile format, therefore, arguably inflects one likely meaning of the portrait’s placement in the body of the book - to signify “man of the people” – making it, additionally, into representative or elevated man of the people, but not one invested with associations of traditional spiritual authority. This is Nkrumahist ideology given its subtlest visual form.

Although at one stage Strand considered placing opposite the Nkrumah portrait one of his images of old trees, exemplary of ideas of sacrifice and continuity, in the finished book this was replaced by an image of a village school with a line of children waiting to enter it. Simplicity, perhaps a necessary functionality - of shirted leader as much as of school building - both stand for the new Ghana.<sup>74</sup> The school was a particularly potent emblem of post-independence modernity and one markedly distinct from those works of colonial modernization like sanitation, roads and commerce.<sup>75</sup> Strand inflects this in telling ways by choosing a school whose structure is astylar (simple wooden poles) and made of materials to hand (corrugated iron roofing) in a kind of non-modernist modern vernacular,<sup>76</sup> while a large tree overhangs two-thirds of the scene. This is one aspect of the modernity that Strand aligns with Nkrumah. There is a technological or “high” form of modernization too, in the western mode, and this is placed as a section at the end of the book. Crucially, however, the accelerated modernization of dams and industry is combined with the “lower,” demotic modernity that faces the Nkrumah portrait.

### A deathly colonized world

What has been said about the frontispiece is also relevant to those other portals in the book, the openings to the sections that divide it up. These too needed some visual punctuation if they were to be recognised. Strand’s way of handling these passages was

in most cases to print an image of a landscape over one and a third pages, with a piece of text – a poem or traditional saying – placed centrally on the remaining slice of the double page spread. Strand is not usually associated with images bled to the outer edges of a page, though there are magnificent full bleeds of jungle images on *Ghana*'s end papers.<sup>77</sup> In the section openings his printing required that there be no inner margin or gutter. In compensation his landscapes were cut and printed so that a tree was either positioned on the exact line of the inner spine or closely paralleling it. The book itself indicates, then, that these transitions act as visual pauses, moments where text is allowed briefly (and belatedly in the book's conception)<sup>78</sup> to slacken the intensity elsewhere.

There is, however, one opening to a section that is markedly different and that announces colonialism's explicit presence in nation portrayal. Here an image of the slaving fortress at Shama is used to announce a section on the colonial era. (FIG. 12) In Wright's book a similar fortress had led the writer to some of his most bitter comments: "What spacious dreams! What august faith! How elegantly laid-out the castle is! What bold and plunging lines! What, yes, taste..."<sup>79</sup> Where Wright typically refuses the cathartic moment, Strand attempts to find some contrastive effect and some formal equivalent. The Shama image is charged by its juxtaposition with a piece of text, "A Gold Coast soldier's parody of Psalm 23," that begins sardonically, "The European merchant is my shepherd, and I am in want!"<sup>80</sup> For the image itself there is again no gutter and the fortress is printed over the inner spine. Built by the Dutch and Portuguese to hold slaves and as a redoubt to defend against revolt or marauding rivals, the building is largely shown by the near synecdoche of its set of formidable curving steps. Implacable, yet stained and worn, these rise up two-thirds of the image to a stark gateway above. We are

at the bottom looking up, with nothing honorific about the ascent in front of us and no clear markers of depth in the assemblage of surfaces above the steps. There is even a material echo of these effects as both pages inevitably bend outwards and the crests of this bowing catch the light in the viewer's actual space. Inevitably, real shadow and reflected light obscure the photographed object. The shadowy line of the inner spine deepens, becomes more vertiginous, or shallows and flattens according to the degree of convexity of the curving pages either side of it. Of course that line of the inner spine never disappears; however flat we get the paired pages to lie there is always a line slicing through the single image spread across the pages. (Photographic historians associate this device more with a Brassai or a Jeff Wall, but there is no doubt Strand exploits it too.) No vertical element parallels the spinal divide, unlike in most other section images, indeed the effect of the evidently conjoined and curving pages is to make depicted depth and the actual volume of the page interact, creating a physical undertow to our perception of the rounded steps. Holding a book is a tactile act of bringing physically close the mediating forms of words and paper. The steps of Shama, like the proximate faces of "Man in a Cap," "Yaa Kyeiwa," and Nkrumah himself, become close yet guarded, unfamiliar yet intimate.

In tackling colonialism Strand and Davidson were at one with recent discussions among black artists and writers on the need to represent colonial experience as an unavoidable, indeed integral part of African heritage.<sup>81</sup> But it is unlikely those artists would have identified with *Ghana's* way of dealing with colonialism, or indeed the problem of using photography to do this. Representing colonialism meant either picturing the present but passing it off as showing the past, or picturing what might be claimed as the

continuing effects of colonialism in the present with the inherent problem of political responsibility for that continuation. Davidson had suggested the kind of photographs that might serve the task: “the man asleep? Perhaps, too, some of the markets, the ‘shanty huts’.” One candidate was an image of a mammy wagon, whose slogan “[showed] the worried frenzy of poor men trying hard to make a living,”<sup>82</sup> but this was moved in the final book. Clearly, too, the most overt even clichéd signs of colonialism were to be avoided. This was why two images in particular, one with a figure wearing a solar topee and the other showing a woman in front of a mural depicting a colonial soldier, were both left out of the final book.<sup>83</sup> But, despite the talk of oppositions, what resulted was hardly a “deathly colonized world”: rather than a recognisable section, as in Davidson’s text, any sectional distinction in the photographs dissolved immediately after the Shama image. There followed a piece of poetry, a portrait of a traditional leader, a carved bas relief, another portrait, a village scene, a woman and child, and then what seems another section divider using text and an image of self-help road building. These were followed four images later by a sleeping man, an image Strand had considered for the colonial section. Only then, sixteen pages later, does one come across the Nkrumah portrait, which at one stage in the planning was meant to contrast with images of colonialism but is now placed among a group of images that shift the sequence firmly towards images of modernity, the promise of the new nation.

After the jolting impact of the colonial section’s opening image, the very idea of section coherence thus disappears before our eyes. This may be part of the book’s frequent looseness of association, the way it encourages break-outs and links arcing across its larger paper world (such as between Nkrumah and the Navropio of Navrango,

26 pages before), rather than the kind of close-knit sequencing of some tighter polemic. Here this looseness seems to acknowledge that colonialism cannot easily be separated from Nkrumah's new Ghana, that colonialism does not disappear with declarations of independence, as Nkrumah himself often warned, but at the same time that colonialism need not be a fixture or fixation of the pan-African nation.

### Conclusion

There is another photograph in which Nkrumah's image appears, and here an alternative version is glimpsed, perhaps even an allegory of portraiture's role in nation-building. (FIG. 13) "Chop Bar, Pokuase" exhibits the traits of roadside vernacular art. On the roughly daubed wall of a bar in a suburb of Accra, crudely depicted figures make and eat food within arabesque vignettes. The bar's actual servery is located to the left hand edge of the image, above a plate abandoned on the pavement. Quotidian improvisations like the corrugated roof, abrupt concrete step, and the letter "y" inserted belatedly in "PABEFORE," appear everywhere. Through the dark central entrance we can just recognise a portrait of Nkrumah encircled by the black star of Ghana. Partly intended as an alternative to western commercial modernity and its tarnished offshoots,<sup>84</sup> the photograph shows portrayal as neither the product of some superannuated genre nor even as some metaphysics of resistant gazes, but as direct and ordinary, even witty and upbeat, and certainly as part of a hand-made and demotically constructed contemporaneity. The photograph offers a way of finding portraiture, both metaphoric and actual, already formed in the material cultures of everyday life, as if the power and identity of new nationhood was also to be located there, in a place outside the dynamics of looking and



being looked at. With its centralised but half-hidden image of Nkrumah, set back behind and framed on either side by scenes of the everyday life served by the chop bar itself, the photograph even offers a parallel to what Strand was trying to do with his portrait of Nkrumah embedded in the book itself.

It is not fanciful to conceive of the balancing act between the contradictory motions of modernism and documentary that went into the making of *Ghana: An African Portrait* as a way of avoiding failure, and not just in the sense that any creative enterprise does that. The thirteen years Strand spent on the book encompassed a number of the usual challenges but also unusual ones beyond the compass of the tripod and darkroom: the attempted assassination, fall from power, and changing reputation of the book's hero as well as, closer to home, the challenges of publishing such a book on both sides of the Iron Curtain.<sup>85</sup> If the project, as a progressive attempt to make a synthetic modernist documentary out of idealistic hopes for postcolonial nationhood, was not already made problematic by its father-of-the-nation fixations, its proximity to Nkrumahist ideology, then it had certainly become so. Whatever his original impulses, Strand's search for "balance" became embroiled also in a fending off, a keeping at bay and out of the picture of unwanted scenarios in order that, eventually, the book might seem finished, an achieved synthesis of words and images that would deliver a newly inflected "portrait of an African" wound about with a usefully looser discourse on "an African portrait," each as abstractions somehow found in the course of documentation. All this has also to be related to Strand's desire from the beginning to work outside the kinds of narratives his work otherwise might suggest – not a travelogue, not a revelation, not a subjectively expressive account nor one of pretended detachment, and not so much propaganda as

radical partisanship. If its history and its strategies left the book anachronistic, then its very lack of resolution opens up what the portrait of a nation could be, preventing the book from becoming a monument.

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<sup>1</sup> This marginalisation of the later work is even evident in the most recent hagiographic treatment of Strand, the 2014-16 travelling exhibition whose accompanying book treats the later work only in terms of a roundtable discussion: eds. Peter Barberie and Amanda N. Bock, *Paul Strand – Master of Modern Photography* (Philadelphia, New Haven and London: Philadelphia Museum of Art, Yale University Press, and Fundación MAPFRE, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The distinction is made by Alan Trachtenberg in his “Introduction” to ed. Maren Stange, *Paul Strand – Essays on His Life and Work* (New York: Aperture, 1990), 4.

<sup>3</sup> For Strand’s political affiliations see Mike Weaver, “Dynamic Realist,” in ed. Maren Stange, *Paul Strand – Essays on His Life and Work* (New York: Aperture, 1990); Mike Weaver, “Paul Strand: Native Land,” *The Archive* 27 (1990): 5-16; Fraser MacDonald, “Paul Strand and the Atlanticist Cold War,” *History of Photography* 28:4 (Winter 2004): 357-374.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Mitchell “Introduction,” in ed. Timothy Mitchell, *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xii. For more on alternative modernities in Africa and elsewhere see particularly ed. D. P. Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2001); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and eds. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington IND: Indiana University Press, 2005).

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<sup>5</sup> For the vicissitudes of Nkrumah's posthumous reputation see the articles in the special edition of *Journal of Pan African Studies* 4:9 (January 2012).

<sup>6</sup> CCP AG 17:3/8, Basil Davidson draft, March 1970; CCP AG 17:15, Basil Davidson to Paul Strand, 19/11/59.

<sup>7</sup> Center for Creative Photography, Tucson (hereafter CCP), AG 17:15 Du Bois file (this contains correspondence between Strand and Du Bois from 1953 to Du Bois's death a decade later). Strand sent Du Bois a copy of *La France de Profil*. For Du Bois's much earlier interest in photography see Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> For this period in Ghana's history see Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana 1946-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966); David Apter, *Ghana in Transition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (London: Granada, 1985); and Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999). On Nkrumah see C. L. R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (London: Allison and Busby, 1977); David Rooney, *Kwameh Nkrumah: The Kingdom in the Third World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988); and Ama Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwameh Nkrumah* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). On Ghana and modernization see eds. Peter J. Bloom, Stephen F. Miescher, and Takyiwaa Manuh, *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> For Nkrumah's political philosophy see Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (London: Panaf, 1963); Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism – The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965); and Kwame Nkrumah, *Towards Colonial Freedom* (London: Panaf, 1962).

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<sup>10</sup> Ryszard Kapuscinski, *The Soccer War* (London: Granta, 1990), translated by William Brand, 106.

<sup>11</sup> Basil Davidson, *Black Star – A View of the Life and Times of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 189.

<sup>12</sup> See Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 127-156.

<sup>13</sup> CCA AG 17:3/9, BD to PS and HS, 22/11/63.

<sup>14</sup> Lauri Firstenberg, “Postcoloniality, Performance, and Photographic Portraiture,” in ed. Okwui Enwezor, *The Short Century – Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994* (Munich: Prestel, 2001), 175.

<sup>15</sup> *Ever Young: James Barnor*, exhibition at Rivington Place, London, September-November 2010; J. K. Bruce Vanderpuije, *Ghana Photos Memories* (Paris: Filigrames, 2007); Erin Haney, “Lutterodt Family Studios and the Changing Face of Early Portrait Photographs from the Gold Coast,” in eds. John Pepper and Elizabeth L. Cameron, *Portraiture and Photography in Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University press, 2013), 67-101. For postwar photography in Ghana in relation to other African photography see eds. Clare Bell, Okwui Enwezor, Danielle Tilkin, and Octavio Zaya, *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996); Erin Haney, *Photography and Africa* (London: Reaktion, 2010); and ed. Richard Vokes, *Photography in Africa: Ethnographic Perspectives* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2012). On *Drum* see Okwui Enwezor, “A Critical Presence: *Drum* Magazine in Context,” in eds. Bell, Enwezor, Tilkin, and Zaya, *In/sight*, 179-191. Ironically, as well as a driver Strand also apparently used a Ghanaian photojournalist as

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a guide for the early part of his stay: Peter Barberie, “Paul Strand’s Modernity,” in eds.

Barberie and Bock, *Paul Strand*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> This is from the introduction written by the playwright Efua Sutherland: Willis E. Bell, *The Roadmakers* (Accra: Ghana Information Services, 1961), unpaginated.

<sup>17</sup> Wright’s book (the illustrated British edition) appears in the bibliography for *Ghana: An African Portrait*.

<sup>18</sup> The book was hugely popular, selling some 300,000 copies: Sara Blair, *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 75. For more on *Twelve Million* see Jeff Allred, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapter 4.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Wright, *Black Power* (London: Denis Dobson, 1954), 1-3. It was a distancing that also led Wright into covert collaboration with American foreign policy interests: Carol Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa – Writers in a Common Cause* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 124-5. With this new and highly subjectivized manner Wright also moved beyond his earlier model of the writer as a professional working within his or her autonomous craft and informed by Marxist theory: Richard Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (1937), in ed. Angelyn Mitchell, *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African-American Literary Criticism from the Renaissance to the Present* (Durham NC: Duke University press, 1994), 97-106.

<sup>20</sup> Sara Blair has even argued that Wright’s book is a re-working of the colonial travel narrative: Sara Blair, “The Photograph as History: Richard Wright, *Black Power*, and the Narratives of the Nation,” *English Language Notes* 44:2 (Fall/Winter 2006): 65-72.

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Wright to Paul Reynolds, 19 March 1954, as quoted in Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (New York: William Morrow, 1973), 403.

<sup>22</sup> The two photographs in the Harpers edition were both of Nkrumah and placed together as a frontispiece to the book. As well as its eleven groups of photographs, the London edition had the frontispiece photographs of Nkrumah replaced by a map of the country. Another difference between the two versions was Harpers' longer title – *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* – which seems to make some attempt, if only defensively, to prepare the reader for Wright's critical and emotional response.

<sup>23</sup> This was even more the case with Wright's unpublished record of the country. During his time in Ghana he took over 1500 photographs: Blair, *Harlem Crossroads*, 99. Blair even argues that the book "is in its production and internal dynamic a photo-text": Ibid, 99.

<sup>24</sup> Wright, *Black Power*, 68, 331. The same statements are made in the American edition: Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York, Harpers, 1954). However, without accompanying photographs – or at least the possibility that the reader might find photographs to match these incidents – the statements have an entirely different status.

<sup>25</sup> These counter- or anti-epiphanies are staged, by implication, against the forms of modernist epiphany that happened in front of the primitivist object of desire and often away from Africa: see Simon Gikandi, "Africa and the Epiphany of Modernism," in eds. Doyle and Winkiel, *Geomodernisms*, 31-50.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *Black Power*, 39-40.

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<sup>27</sup> It also leads to a discussion about Wright's confusion and embarrassment faced with dancing female bodies that remind him of similar improvised dances he had seen in the American Deep South: Wright, *Black Power*, 56-57.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, facing 295.

<sup>29</sup> On Sartre's ocularphobia see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993), 276-298.

<sup>30</sup> For more on Wright's implicit critique of Négritude see his paper "Tradition and Industrialization," delivered at the 1956 Conference of Black Writers and republished in Richard Wright, *Black Power – Three Books from Exile* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008). For Nkrumah's own critique of Négritude see Biney, *Nkrumah*, 120-22.

<sup>31</sup> Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 288.

<sup>32</sup> For a psychological reading of this see Dorothy Stringer, "Psychology and Black Liberation in Richard Wright's *Black Power* (1954)," *Journal of Modern Literature* 32:4, (Summer 2009): 105-124.

<sup>33</sup> On this see Kevin Gaines, "Revisiting Richard Wright in Ghana: Black Radicalism and the Dialectics of Diaspora," *Social Text* 19:2 (Summer 2001), 75-101.

<sup>34</sup> Wright, *Black Power*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 120-122.

<sup>38</sup> For some of these reactions see Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*, 137-9. One reason Wright might have felt able to write like this was that he had known Nkrumah on a more equal basis

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in London seven years before: Joe Appiah, *Joe Appiah: The Autobiography of an African Patriot* (New York: Greenwood, 1990), 159.

<sup>39</sup> In 1951, with Leo Hurwitz, Strand had made the film *Native Son*, based on Wright's novel of that name. Although from totally different backgrounds, Wright's and Strand's later lives had some parallels, notably their interest in Communism, their common expatriate status in France, and their shared interest in pan-Africanism.

<sup>40</sup> Travelling with his wife Hazel Strand, their travels took them first to coastal areas near Accra, especially to the new town of Tema, and to Cape Coast and Elmina with their old slaving castles. As an example of Ghana's modernization, Tema was especially important and they visited it several times, taking pictures of the busy port and its refinery, as well as portraits of workers. They also used these coastal areas to take photographs of communal endeavour in fishing communities. Inland they visited villages to photograph "people and their surroundings," the gardens at Aburi, and especially the work being done on the Volta Dam at Akosombo which, like Tema, was visible evidence of Ghana's modernizing dynamic: CCP AG 17:3/7, Paul and Hazel Strand to Kwame Nkrumah, 10/11/63. Later they went to Kumasi and the central Asante area, and the Northern Region was explored at the end of the trip; in both areas they viewed industries and agriculture, but mostly local crafts and examples of traditional buildings. Finally, they returned to Accra to see further examples of urban life and modernization, but also markets and political rallies. In 1955 Strand described his general approach to the task of portraying a country. It was based on accepting that one was a stranger and therefore that "humility and respect" and a process of "gradual absorption, of sympathetic perception" were needed: Paul Strand writing in *U.S. Camera*, 1955, as quoted in Paul Strand, *The World on My Doorstep* (London: Robert Hale, 1994), 92.



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<sup>41</sup> Paul Strand, *Ghana: An African Portrait* (New York: Aperture, 1976), 7, 9.

<sup>42</sup> The same range of subjects, both panoramic and epitomizing in their coverage, can be found in *Living Egypt* and was also intended for the unfinished book on Romania. The best sense of what Strand intended for the Romania book can be gained from the maquette that he prepared for it: CCP AG 17:30.

<sup>43</sup> Davidson was particularly critical of this cult: Basil Davidson, *Black Star* (London: Penguin, 1973), 189.

<sup>44</sup> Strand, *Ghana*, 155-6.

<sup>45</sup> Strand was extremely particular about his publishers and very keen to have the book published both sides of the Iron Curtain. Several publishers were approached in the period between 1966 and 1972, including East German and Czech publishers, and several times Davidson and Strand thought they were on the verge of an agreement: CCP AG 17/18, Paul Strand to Kwame Nkrumah 21/12/66. While Strand had for some time sought to publish his books both sides of the Iron Curtain, for Nkrumah the rise in Communist bloc technical aid to Ghana in 1963 would have given added incentive: see the special issue “Cold War Transfer: architecture and planning from socialist countries in the ‘Third World’,” *Journal of Architecture* 17:3 (2012).

<sup>46</sup> A similar argument is made in Blake Stimson, *The Pivot of the World: Photography and its Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 57.

<sup>47</sup> For the book’s impact on a Ghanaian living in the USA see Abena P. A. Busia, “Of Records and Memory: An African Portrait Revisited,” in ed. Peter E. Randall, *Ghana – An African Portrait Revisited* (Portsmouth NH and Accra: Peter E. Randall and Sub-Saharan

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Publishers, 2007). For its much later impact on Ghanaian photographic culture see Nii

Obadan and Bruno Boudjellal, *Who Knows Tomorrow?* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Oeil, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> See Steve Yates, "The Transition Years: New Mexico" and Katherine C. Ware, "The Photographs of Mexico, 1940," both in ed. Stange, *Paul Strand*, 87-99, 109-121.

<sup>49</sup> Calvin Tomkins, "Profiles – Look to the Things Around You," *The New Yorker* (16 September 1974), 86. For images of Strand at work see Paul Strand, *The World At My Feet 1950-1976* (London: Aperture/Robert Hale, 1994), 13, 17; eds. Barberie and Bock, *Paul Strand*, 3, 332, 344.

<sup>50</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History Matthew Brody to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1990), 197-204.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Wright was also alert to the potential in re-directing this rhetoric. In *Twelve Million* he prefaced his section "Men in the Making" with an image of a steel worker that would normally epitomize worker heroism, but this is a false trail; the section's text actually evokes toil, poverty and social dislocation as the more common experiences of African Americans.

<sup>52</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882), trans. Josephine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), sections 13 and 118.

<sup>53</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity – An Essay on Exteriority* (1961) trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 212.

<sup>54</sup> Margaret Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), as quoted in John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 100.

<sup>55</sup> See Terry Eagleton, *Trouble With Strangers – A Study of Ethics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 235, 241.

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<sup>56</sup> “No photographer, even the most gifted, can claim ownership of what appears in the photograph. Every photograph of others bears the traces of the meeting between the photographed persons and the photographer, neither of whom can, on their own, determine, how this meeting will be inscribed on the photo:” Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* trans. R. Mazali and R. Danieli (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 11-12.

<sup>57</sup> On the politics of alterity as a duty to those photographed, see especially Azoulay, *Civil Contract*, 375-411.

<sup>58</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) trans. C. L. Markmann (London: Pluto, 1986), 170.

<sup>59</sup> Haney, *Photography*. Eva Meyerowitz was a student of Bronislaw Malinowski who worked at Achimota College in the 1940s and 1950s and wrote a four-volume series on Akan belief systems. These included numerous photographs of unsmiling sitters, usually religious leaders, which Meyerowitz used them to illustrate the attributes of religious belief: see Eva L. M. Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951); Eva L. M. Meyerowitz, *Akan Traditions of Origin* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952); Eva L. M. Meyerowitz, *The Akan of Ghana* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958); Eva L. M. Meyerowitz, *The Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960). My point here is to indicate that ethnographic photography, so often understood as a form of disciplinary power and a subjugation of the indigenous subject, may also register a form of comportment which is both collaborative and resistant.

<sup>60</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* (London, Reaktion, 2013), 69. The classic discussion of the problematics of this effect is T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 47-8.

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<sup>61</sup> Nana Akua Kyerewaa Opokuwaa, *The Quest for Spiritual Transformation: Introduction to Traditional Akan Religion, Rituals and Practices* (New York: iUniverse, 2005), 2.

<sup>62</sup> This is a point made by Tsitsi Jaji in the roundtable discussion published in eds. Barberie and Bock, *Paul Strand*, 285.

<sup>63</sup> See, for instance, John Roberts, *Photography and its Violations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 61.

<sup>64</sup> Janet Hess, “Spectacular Nation: Nkrumahist Art and Resistance Iconography in the Ghanaian Independence Era,” *African Arts* 39:1 (Spring 2006): 18-20.

<sup>65</sup> CCP AG 17:3/7, Paul Strand to Kwame Nkrumah, 20/5/65.

<sup>66</sup> CCP AG 17:30, three volume maquette consisting of 124 images, undated.

<sup>67</sup> Strand soon realized that the moment was mistimed given the pressure that Nkrumah was under: CCP AG 17:3/7, Paul Strand to Kwame Nkrumah, 29/7/65.

<sup>68</sup> Davidson suggested that Nkrumah simply didn’t want any image of himself in the book “because he’s very sensitive to any suggestion that he may be encouraging any sort of personality cult”: CCP AG 17:3/9 Basil Davidson to Paul Strand, 5/8/65.

<sup>69</sup> CCP AG 17:3/7. Kwame Nkrumah to Paul Strand, 5/8/65; AG 17:3/9, Basil Davidson to Paul Strand, 19/7/65. On official portraits of Nkrumah see Janet Hess, “Exhibiting Ghana: Display, Documentary and ‘National’ Art in the Nkrumah Era,” *African Studies Review* 44:1 (2001): 70; Hess, “Spectacular Nation,” 16-25. Nkrumah’s identification with Garibaldi as the archetype of the romantic nationalist hero is clear in his desire to base his own statue outside Parliament House in Accra on the Garibaldi monument in Rome: Public Records Archives and Administration Department, Accra, RG5/1/98. On the meanings of portraits placed as frontispieces see Pointon, *Portrayal*, 23-26.

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<sup>70</sup> CCP AG 17:3/7, Paul Strand to Kwame Nkrumah, 11/8/65.

<sup>71</sup> Strand seems to have dropped the other, full-face portrait of Nkrumah from the book probably because he thought Nkrumah himself found it too aggressive: CCP AG 17:3/9, Paul Strand to Basil Davidson, 22/7/65.

<sup>72</sup> For a related situation in Gambia see Liam Buckley, "Portrait Photography in a Postcolonial Age: How Beauty Tells the Truth," in eds. Peffer and Cameron, *Portraiture and Photography*, 287-314.

<sup>73</sup> T. P. Omari, *Kwame Nkrumah: The Anatomy of an African Dictatorship* (London: Hurst, 1970), 60; Henry I. Bretton, *The Rise and Fall of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Pall Mall, 1966), 88.

<sup>74</sup> CCP AG 17:30, maquette of Ghana book.

<sup>75</sup> Mamadou Diouf, "Modernity: Africa," in ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz, *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* 4 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2005), 1478. I am grateful to Ayala Levin for this reference.

<sup>76</sup> Willis E. Bell's tendency still to toe a western, even neo-colonialist line, is nowhere better exemplified than in his image of a new school built by the British architects Fry & Drew, which is set in contrast with an older abandoned school building: Bell, *The Roadmakers*, 36-7.

<sup>77</sup> Such devices may, of course, be attributable to the book designer, David Epstein, but Strand would have approved them.

<sup>78</sup> CCP AG 17/15, Davidson file, Michael Hoffmann to Basil Davidson, 17/3/75.

<sup>79</sup> Wright, *Black Power*, 341.

<sup>80</sup> Davidson found the parody in J. Ayodele Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa 1900-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 345.

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<sup>81</sup> This was the view of the Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, Rome 1959: see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic – Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 195; Michel Fabre, *The World of Richard Wright* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 208-209.

<sup>82</sup> CCP AG 17:3/10, “Notes on Structure,” written by Basil Davidson, February 1965.

<sup>83</sup> CCP Photographic Collection 81:077:040, 81:077:091.

<sup>84</sup> See also CCP Photographic Collection 81:077:001 – not published in the book, this shows a general store with a prominent advert for “Surf washes cleaner.” Another unpublished image shows a girl with a dress printed with a “Holland, Heineken” design: CCP Photographic Collection 81:007:021. Strand’s omission of these images in favour of the chop bar must have been precisely because they included reference to western mass culture.

<sup>85</sup> Progress at first was remarkably if misleadingly fast. A maquette of the book was produced by May 1965 with *An African Portrait* as a working title: CCP AG 17:3/7, Paul Strand to Kwame Nkrumah, 20/5/65. Davidson sent Strand his first version of the text in July 1966: CCP AG 17:15, Davidson file, Basil Davidson to Paul Strand, 1/7/66. Soon, though, Strand was predicting that the actual publication of the book would have to await much larger political events (“the beginning of the inevitable defeat of imperialist aggression worldwide”: CCP AG 17:3/7, Paul and Hazel Strand to Kwame Nkrumah, 18/12/67), and the military coup of 1966 ensured this. Initially, Strand reassured the exiled Nkrumah that the coup would not affect the book (CCP AG 17:3/7, Kwame Nkrumah to Paul and Hazel Strand, 29/12/66; Paul and Hazel Strand to Kwame Nkrumah, 18/12/67), but publishers certainly saw a problem: Longmans “looked a little anxious,” while Random House “is frightened by the name Nkrumah” (CCP AG 17:3/9, Basil Davidson to Paul Strand, 8/10/68; CCP AG

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17:3/9, Basil Davidson to Paul Strand, 21/6/68; CCP AG 17:3/9 Paul Strand to Basil Davidson, 16/6/68). The new line was to convince publishers that the book was about “Ghana as it was in Nkrumah’s time” rather than “Nkrumah’s Ghana.” Finally, Nkrumah’s death in 1972 opened the way for a revival of his reputation and Aperture took over the book in that same year. After two further revisions of Davidson’s text and the last minute insertion of poems and traditional sayings between the groups of photographs, the book was finally published in 1975: CCP AG 17/15, Davidson file, Basil Davidson to Paul and Hazel Strand, 30/1/73; CCP AG 17/15, Davidson file, Paul Strand to Basil and Marion Davidson, 31/3/75.